

# Before Nation

## Scale-Blind Anthropology and Foragers' Worlds of Relatives

### by Nurit Bird-David

Cross-culturally, tiny hunter-gatherer-cultivator communities refer to themselves by such terms as "real people," "humans," and "kinspeople." Anthropology has generally neglected their "we designations," because its large-scale project is predicated on ethnonymic identifications. Ethnographers either assign these groups proper names or use the local terms as if they were proper names, leaving local identity categories understudied. Inspired by Benedict Anderson's "styles" of imagining communities and the "ontological turn," I argue that indigenous we designations reveal modes of "being many" unlike that expressed in the modern "nation." The kin-based idiom used by the South Indian foragers that I consider in this article, in fact, signals a subversion of nation. Their mode of being many accommodates diverse members (including nonhumans) at the price of low scalability, whereas the national style assembles unlimited numbers of dispersed but similar members. Focusing on scale, scaling, and scalability, I question scholars' inattention to locals' self-determined horizons of concern when analyzing indigenous cultures and ontologies and to huge disparities in population size when comparing indigenous and Western societies. My case illustrates how scale-blind anthropology generally distorts understanding of tiny indigenous communities' lifeways, ontologies, and political struggles.

In the mid-twentieth century, when Elman Service described the hunter-gatherer band as "a very-small-scaled society, as *societies go*" (1966:24), he was reiterating a standard view. Estimation of processes and entities in comparative "more" or "less" terms, with reference to a scale ranging from large to small, was standard practice in everyday life (Strathern 1992), and this practice was extended in anthropology to characterizing societies. At the same time, anthropology entangled scale with time and both with the progressive development of plural forms. In the dogma of the day, society grew in size over time, and this growth was accompanied by increasing complexity, fragmentation, and heterogeneity. Small-scale society, in this paradigm, was simple and homogenous by definition. This temporal sense was ingrained in ethnographic praxis (Fabian 1983) until, in the latter part of the century, the contemporaneity of the ethnographic subject (obvious as it seems now) achieved recognition. In the process, scale lost its function as a key coordinate in mapping and studying the diversity of societies. Although "small-scale society" is a label still often used in other disciplines, it has given way in anthropology to scale-blind regional and political categories (e.g., Amerindian peoples, Melanesian societies, indigenous peoples, and First Nations). Cultural anthropology now imagines its subjects as a series of equitably comparable societies or cultures. Cultures

are routinely compared for key analytical inspirations without regard to huge disparities in population size and locals' own horizons of concern.

The foregoing sketch skims over deep waters, as do all broad story lines. However, it suffices for introducing the current dogma, whose distortive effect I explore in this article, with special attention to the anthropology of tiny-scale hunter-gatherer-cultivator groups (leaving to other studies larger-scale hunter-gatherer-cultivators and, more generally, the continuous range of plural forms between tiny-scale hunter-gatherer and large-scale societies). I call this dogma the "scale-blind regime" and refer by this term to ethnographic and comparative analysis that overlooks, if not obscures, the scale of populations, the modes of plural life their scale/scaling potentiates and limits, and their horizons of imagination.

Scale blindness is perpetuated through influential and ambitious comparisons between Western and hunter-gatherer-cultivator societies that set disciplinary agendas: for example, comparisons of Western and hunter-gatherer perceptions of the environment (Ingold 2000), Western and Melanesian ideas of gender (Strathern 1988), and Western and Amazonian ontologies (Viveiros de Castro 2012). The huge scalar disparities involved in such efforts have not critically concerned anthropologists. Misgivings about these comparisons revolve around essentializing the cultures compared, overdrawing the contrasts between them, and overhomogenizing within them. Recent influential work, in fact, expands the discipline's scale-blind comparative charter to all cultures, for example, classifying four cross-scalar types of human approaches to non-

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humans (Descola 2013 [2005]). Scale blindness is equally perpetuated through ethnographies that, more often than not in this pervasive milieu, cursorily provide an estimate of the size of the population of interest and, just as briefly, note the size of the specific group the ethnographer lived with. The ethnographies then pursue their respective topical concerns, with scale and scaling playing a minor role, if any, in the analysis. And in subsequent articles and comparative work, the population estimates may be dropped altogether, if only for limitations of space—their omission is not a cause for concern. The reader is presented with analytical arguments that are insensitive and unintentionally blind to scalar contexts and scalability.

So pervasive is the scale-blind regime that readers with no personal experience of hunter-gatherer-cultivators may not even be aware of just how tiny some of these groups are, fed into the comparative mill as they are alongside societies of many millions. They also may not realize the problematic nature of any size estimates that are given. The ethnographer conducts her fieldwork with a community whose members often refer to themselves as “real people,” “humans,” “relatives,” and so on. To communicate about them, she has to pigeonhole them into recognized ethnic categories and to identify them vis-à-vis names that circulate in their respective regions as well as those that have accumulated in the literature through the work of generations of “identity experts.”<sup>1</sup> These “experts” include travelers, missionaries, colonial officers, state officials, anthropologists, and the like, whose ethnic mappings—even those based on field excursions—reflect the authors’ situated (and, for the most part, modern) viewpoints. Little wonder that surveying these populations is not only logically challenging (and in some cases politically charged) but also conceptually murky. Notwithstanding, these communities are very small, on the order of scale, as estimated by one authority, of “a few hundred to a few thousand inhabitants” (Smith and Wishnie 2000:493, n. 1).

For hunter-gatherers specifically, the found “magic numbers” are 25–50 men, women, and children for local group size and 500 for the entire population (Lee and Devore 1968:11); the average hunter-gatherer local group size has been calculated at 28.4 persons (Kelly 1995:211). A local hunter-gatherer group is smaller than an average-size classroom of university students, and an entire population may be less than the student cohort of some anthropology departments. The hunter-gatherer-gardener Amazonian Arawete totaled 136 men, women, and children living in one village in the early 1980s, when Eduardo Viveiros de Castro studied them (in preceding decades, they had numbered 300 people living in four villages; Viveiros de Castro 1992 [1986]:19). The Southeast Asian forager-cultivator Chewong totaled 131 people, when Signe Howell (1984:15, 18) studied them in the late 1970s. Compared with hundreds of millions of Westerners (however defined), some hunter-gatherer-cultivator peoples are nanoscale societies. Their own

horizons of concern cannot even be gauged when one is blind to this minuteness. We can safely assume, though, that these peoples do not share the spirit that led Europeans to explore and colonize imagined lands in the far corners of the Earth.

Scaling is a human activity, and so, in Bruno Latour’s words, we should explore how and what “actors achieve by *scaling, spacing, and contextualising each other*” (2005:183). Latour argued that it is not the scholar’s job to decide in the actor’s stead what groups make up the world. “Actors should not be denied,” he wrote, “one of their most important privileges, namely, that they are the ones defining relative scale” (Latour 2005:184). While Latour generally focused on the Moderns and their large-scaling projects, his point also applies to hunter-gatherer-cultivator peoples, and denying them the privilege of defining their own horizons is precisely what scale-blind ethnography and analysis does. The intersections of local, national, and global scale-making projects have begun to draw attention (e.g., Ferguson and Gupta 2002; Tsing 2005; Xiang 2013). However, I maintain that traditional indigenous communities were caught within the large-scale modern imagination of plural life well before they were caught within the webs of national bureaucracies and global connections. My objective in this article (part of a broader ethnographic and theoretical project; see Bird-David 2017) is to sketch how scalar blindness works and to examine its distortive effects on study of traditional indigenous practice and imagination. A nascent “scalar turn” in anthropology (a fully blown perspective in other social sciences<sup>2</sup>) is turning attention to the large scale and large scaling as a frame of thought and a resource involving particular ways of seeing and making the world (e.g., Scott 1998; Strathern 1992) and particular senses of plurality, complexity, and diversity (e.g., Strathern 1991). There is much, I maintain, to be gained from approaching indigenous tiny-scale/scaling projects from this perspective (and I do so in Bird-David 2017). In this article, I focus on the universalization and naturalization of the modern idea of “nation” that ethnonymic designation of tiny societies reinforces, and I begin to address how such communities themselves make and conceptualize their pluralities.

To explore the “otherwise” (Elizabeth Povinelli’s term) of nation might appear an esoteric project in an era when the absence of nations is almost unimaginable (Billig 1995:77), a time when everyone is presumed to “have” a nationality, alongside gender and other identity attributes (Anderson 1991 [1983]:6). “Methodological nationalism” now dominates the social sciences no less than does methodological individualism (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002; see, e.g., Nadasdy 2012 and Wade et al. 2014 for ethnographic examples), propelled by presumed “groupism,” that is, the idea that people belong to distinctive, bounded, solidary groups (Brubaker 2004). To com-

1. I borrow Viveiros de Castro’s (2012:180) felicitous term.

2. Over the past two decades, social geographers have intensively engaged with issues of scale (e.g., Howitt 2002; Jones 1998; Masuda and Crooks 2007). Anthropologists have done so more sporadically (e.g., see Berreman 1987; Ferguson and Gupta 2002; Latour 2005, especially 183–185; Strathern 1991, 1995).

plicate matters, some indigenous peoples regard themselves and are regarded as "First Nations," a strategic move that has the unintended consequence of universalizing the nation, projecting it as primordial, and precluding the possible existence of alternatives.<sup>3</sup> But anthropologists have explored the "otherwise" of the modern constitution of nature and of the individual, and there is no reason for us not to also do so with the modern concept of nation. In this article, I begin to explore what I call alternative options of "being many," with particular focus on foragers who designate themselves "us, relatives."

Benedict Anderson's (1991 [1983]) seminal work provides a useful framework for pursuing my objective. In contemporary terms, his approach could be described as ontological and also as scalar. He approached the nation as a modern "style" of imagining community and argued that profound changes during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in ontic concepts of time, space, and action "made it possible to 'think [it]'" (1991 [1983]:28). "Imagining," in this thesis, refers to profound and consequential human action, rather than to superfluous fabrication, a view that resonates with anthropological perspectives.<sup>4</sup> A basic condition of the nation, as Anderson defines it, is spatial dispersal of members beyond the horizons of personal reach. "Members of even the smallest nation," he writes, "will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (1991 [1983]:6).<sup>5</sup> Anderson (1991 [1983]:6) argues that all communities are imagined and that they are distinguished by the style of their imagining. His study of the origin and spread of the nation overshadowed the general framework within which it was carried out. As a result, his notion of imagined community is often used synonymously with its modern mode: the nation. His general hypothesis, though, invites us to explore other styles of "being many," and his scalar sense of the conditions of the nation provides a good counter instance for exploring tiny hunter-gatherer-cultivators' ontological options.

I turn to indigenous peoples' designations of themselves as a prism on their imaginations of "being many." Most of these communities are known by multiple names, commonly applied to them by outsiders and sometimes pejorative. Anthro-

pologists have approached their appellations technically and, increasingly, politically, that is, as a matter of choosing the most "authentic" and "proper" name. Though generally recognized, the cross-cultural recurrence of indigenous categories of identity that we simply translate as "real people," "humans," "relatives," and the like (as if such notions could be simple) has prompted little theoretical interest. Brief yet insightful exceptions address the recurring Amerindian notions of "real people" and "humans" (notably, Lévi-Strauss 1973 [1952]:384 and Viveiros de Castro 1998:447; see also Viveiros de Castro 2009:242, 2012:97–98). In this article, I continue this incipient discussion with special reference to people who designate themselves "us, relatives," drawing for ethnographic concreteness on my work with a South Indian forager group.<sup>6</sup> Kinship studies have proven productive for exploring modes of "being one" beyond the modern individual, and inspired by this work, I turn to kinship to examine modes of "being many" other than nation.

I argue in this article that foragers show us previously unexamined scales and structures of plural identity. Belonging, for them, is a matter of being with others (diverse as they may be) rather than being like others (dispersed as they may be). Using ethnonyms is inevitable in anthropology's large-scale comparative project, but as I labor to show, this praxis paradoxically obscures different experiences and imaginations of "being many." Ethnonymic designations, I contend, carry into indigenous worlds of relatives the modern "whole and parts" imagination and conceal locals' own alternatives. I first examine how scale blindness inherently involves application of large-scale standards to the ethnography of tiny hunter-gatherer-cultivator groups. Ethnonymic practice is one such standard, and it leads to what I call the "ethnonymic catch-22." Thereafter, I elaborate on ethnonymic versus kinship ontological grammars of plural identity and examine how the former subverts the latter. Finally, I illustrate the general distortive scope of scale blinding through three brief examples (demographic, ontological, and political).

### Large-Scale Anthropology of Tiny-Scale Groups

In *Time and the Other* (1983), Johannes Fabian explored how modernity's temporal concepts and discourse shaped the making of the anthropological subject through the mid to late twentieth century. Modernity's scalar perspectives, I contend, have also contributed to this shaping and continue to do so today. Large-scale perspectives that have propelled cross-cultural comparison unleash their power over the forms and terms of ethnography among tiny-scale groups. The scale-blind regime, in effect, perpetuates application of a large-scale-biased framework to the study of these groups. The ethnonymic des-

3. The First Nations discourse comes from and serves natives' desire to be recognized as peoples who exercised sovereignty over territories, especially in North America, that Europeans declared *terra nullius* on first encountering them. Notably, some native communities are/were larger than the tiny hunter-gatherer groups on which this article focuses. Even in those cases, however, careful attention should be paid to who counts and who is counted as native, to the fluidity of ethnic names informing demographic surveys, and to confederations that include multiple groups under one name.

4. For anthropologically varied uses of imagination, see Gaonkar 2002 and Sneath, Holbraad, and Pedersen 2009.

5. Irad Malkin (2011:15) suggests that the ancient Greek civilization as we know it became more "Greek" the more widely its people dispersed; thus, ethnic sentiments may have been predicated on spatial dispersal as early as classical times.

6. My long-term study began with fieldwork in 1978–1979 and continued with visits in 1989, 2001, and (briefly) 2012. It has benefited from the fieldwork of my former student Daniel Naveh (2003–2004) and my student Noa Lavi (2010, 2012, 2014). This longitudinal study has produced many articles (for a selection, see <https://www.academia.edu>).

ignation is one chief element, and it is instructive to first place it within the context of others. All are familiar to the point of transparency, and it is for this very reason that I expand on them. I give concrete illustrations of the general praxis from my own work.

Writing ethnography is about determining, translating, and articulating scales. Fieldwork takes place in a particular locality, and the ethnographer marks its location on maps that evolved within colonial and state regimes (in one view, a nationalistic development; see Anderson 1991 [1983]). Such maps serve readers' instant recognition of where on the globe the ethnographic subjects live, recognition dependent on readers' own large-scaled spatial imaginations. Ethnographers of tiny hunter-gatherer-cultivator communities customarily provide a regional map with an arrow pointing to the field site, a map of the country where it is found reduced to an inset. Even this device blows indigenous locales out of all proportion, not to mention locals' own understandings and imaginations of their surroundings. I worked with a cluster of five closely interconnected hamlets, separated from one another by a three- to six-hour walk through the forest. I marked the hamlets' locations on a map of the Nilgiris region (1:333,000) that included an inset map of India (1:4,000,000). On this map, the hamlets appeared as closely spaced dots. The forest between and surrounding them—the foragers' everyday world, the ambit of their lives, the focus of their daily experience, where they shared the repetitive mundane, leisure and trouble, boredom and excitement, that is, their *sime* (home world)—was indiscernible. Even to say that these foragers lived “in” India—or, for that matter, in the Nilgiris, in the forest, indeed, even in clusters of three to six bamboo-and-grass huts—entrenches their world in terms foreign to it. The seemingly innocent preposition “in” sneaks into their world a sense of national space—and of nature and society, too—as an abstract container in which they lived. They themselves were not concerned so much with where they lived as with whom they lived.

The ethnographer also has to relate her intimate study group to broad ethnic categories and, in reader-friendly terms, pencil it onto large-scale ethnic maps drawn by external acknowledged identity experts. Distinguishing between ethnic groups was critical to colonial governmentality, whatever the context, and in India this work occurred on a colossal scale. Cultures, societies, religions, castes, tribes, and languages were distinguished and listed in the course of the mammoth process of developing the Indian census, starting with nonsynchronous data collection (1820–1870) and continuing through more systematic, comprehensive enumerations (1871–1901). Explorers, travelers, British administrators, and anthropologists have all expended much effort trying to distinguish and name tiny, scattered forager communities. Voluminous colonial and early anthropological literature on the Nilgiris showed how “the forest” of ethnic distinctions in that region had grown over the years (Bird 1987). As I researched the literature, I was reminded of Winnie the Pooh, who circled a tree and, spotting more and more footprints (his own), read them as growing evidence that a

mysterious animal, a Heffalump, has been there before him. Like Pooh, generations of observers in the Nilgiris took the labored and shaky ethnic divisions mapped by their predecessors as evidence of what “really” existed. I sympathized with a colonial officer who, a century before me, frankly wrote that “it is difficult to get a complete account of the tribal divisions recognized by them” (note that he assumed such divisions) as their villages “are so dispersed over the slopes and base of the hills, that the inhabitants of one locality know nothing of those at a distance” (Breeks 1873:48, 50). For various good reasons (see Bird 1987), I settled on naming my forest study community Nayaka.

Though geographical, historical, and political contexts differ from case to case, the foregoing gives a general sense of ethnographers' experiences in introducing the tiny groups they study. An additional example, drawn from another continent, further illustrates the difficulties involved. Phillippe Descola introduces the Achuar as “a small block of some 4,500 individuals sprinkled along either side of the border between Ecuador and Peru” and as “one of the four dialect groups that make up the Jivaroan linguistic family” (1994:7). Descola richly describes their widely dispersed settlements (as of the late 1970s), each household occupying its own forest clearing. A winding river ran past these clearings, and a full day was needed to go by canoe from one household to its nearest neighbor. Ten to 15 such households formed a supralocal structure, for which locals, who were closely related by kinship and affinity, had no name (Descola 1994:9). Had these relatives imagined themselves to be part of an Achuar ethnopolitical unit and of the Jivaroan linguistic family before various authorities, including ethnographers, did?

The ethnographer also provides census data for her intimate fieldwork group, or at least some ethnographers do. In my doctoral thesis (Bird 1983:41), I provided a demographic breakdown for the five hamlets I worked with: 22 men, 24 women, and 23 children, who were all related, lived in these places. The largest hamlet was inhabited by 8 men, 6 women, and 12 children. The core of this hamlet comprised two sets of adult siblings (four each), who had three marriages between them (residential cores of intermarried siblings are common among tiny-scale hunter-gatherer-cultivator groups; e.g., see Marshall 1979; Nuckolls 1993). Since hunter-gatherers are mobile, or at least the residential population constantly fluctuates, one might question the accuracy of such figures, especially because the “law of large numbers” that smooths out the murky side of any survey does not work on this miniature scale. This problem is resolvable, for instance, by taking a census on a given day or by taking recurring censuses (quite easy for me to do, because I could count most hamlets' residents on my fingers and those in the largest hamlet by adding in toes). A more profound problem is that such census data exerts a large-scale multiplicative alchemy. The data transform few relatives who all live together into so many generalized, serialized, same-and-separate men, women, and children, and this familiar modern set of coordinates, paradoxically, numbs attention to how few they actually are.

The ethnographer, next, has to refer by personal names to the protagonists of her ethnographic tale, if only for the sake of intelligibility. Alas, like other foragers, the Nilgiris people I studied commonly referred to and addressed each other by kinship terms. Outsiders bestowed personal names on them, just as they did an ethnonym, to suit their own needs. The foragers were known, confusingly, by multiple personal names, some of them derogatory. At the start of my fieldwork, I recorded conversations such as the following: A man new to me arrives in the hamlet, and I ask “my [fieldwork] father” what the new man’s name is. My father turns to the man and asks him, “*Bava(n)* (brother-in-law), what are you called nowadays?” Then, turning back to me, he replies, “He is called Mathen nowadays on the plantation.” The mere act of using names (a necessary measure) ontologically refigures these foragers as a set of individuals, a series of single essential entities, pre-given in advance of their kinship relations, whereas they prefigure themselves as relatives who are born related to everyone through diverse kinship links.

Last but not least, the ethnographer selects her ethnography’s subject matter. Usually, she does not describe the “X people” broadly conceived (e.g., the Nuer or the Trobrianders) but rather—and nowadays especially—this or that domain of X life (e.g., Chewong cosmology, Walpiri gender, Hadza ecology, Mbuti music, Pintupi emotions, Meratu marginality, and Dene land treaties). Multiple domains of knowledge constitute one of the hallmarks of the modern world, whose large-scale outlook is partly the result of the continuous multiplication of these domains. Marilyn Strathern, who offered this observation, suggested that a “merographic principle” underlies this process, involving ideas that write and describe one another within and between domains (1992:73). This principle, she suggests, is simple, but its consequences are far reaching, because, like a computer virus, it operates at great speed and produces infinitely multiplying perspectives in an infinitely growing world, a world perceived as constituted of domains that continually split and multiply. This principle spills over into the anthropology of tiny-scale communities. The number of cultural domains that ethnographers of these communities are now addressing can equal or even supersede the number of a local band’s members.

Of the large-scale-biased standards that are generally applied in the study of tiny hunter-gatherer-cultivator groups, the ethnonymic designation is, perhaps, the trickiest to deploy. Even though her ethnographic subjects do not have a proper ethnonym for themselves, the ethnographer has to use a proper name for them when she writes about them to a generalized reader who has little if any knowledge of those people. The properness of the proper name lies precisely in its effectiveness under these constraints. We cannot do anthropology without proper ethnonyms. I maintain, however, that now and then we must pause to critically reflect on their profound effects.

### Ethnonymic Catch-22

Many would probably agree with Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing when she writes that “anthropologists are not expected to

choose names for the groups they study; conventionally understood, our job is to pick the most authentic label of local identity” (1993:52). However, ethnographers do have to choose names, often under complicated circumstances. Because indigenous peoples’ designations of themselves are often pronominal and not proper names, a void is created that others (including the ethnographer) fill. The result is a confusing multiplicity of names bestowed on them by outsiders. How do ethnographers choose the ethnonyms that constitute (and in a sense invent) their ethnographic subjects?

Tsing’s choice of ethnonym for the Indonesian forager-cultivator people with whom she worked exemplifies the common strategy of deriving an ethnonym from a place-name. The people she worked with were known by their Banjar neighbors as *Bukit* (connoting “hillbilly”), and colonial travelers adopted this name. Contemporary government bureaucrats labeled them *suku terasing* (isolated tribes). Since they lived in the Meratus Mountains, Tsing (1993:52–53) chose to call them Meratus, inventing an ethnonym. This choice is more than reasonable in a nationalist era, when names of population and territory (and language too) often coincide. When extended to indigenous peoples living in a postimperial and postcolonial world, this strategy can produce absurd results. For example, Bronislaw Malinowski’s Trobrianders were named after their home islands, which, in turn, were named after Denis de Trobriand, the French first lieutenant of the first European ship to arrive at the islands in 1793 (Weiner 1988:11). When anthropologists mention “Trobrianders,” do they not unwittingly invoke this naval officer’s spirit?

Another common strategy is to adopt indigenous terms of designation. This strategy is today considered the politically correct course, although it has been more commonly pursued in the past than readers may realize. Consider the following list of ethnonyms (I put each ethnonym in italics as a reminder that the putative proper name is a vernacular word, and I preface the gloss with an approximation sign as a reminder that the word’s translation cannot be as simple as it seems): the Asian *Batek* (~person of our group; see Endicott 1979:3), *Ilongot* (~friends; see Rosaldo 1980:37), and *Ainu* (~most humanly beings; see Svensson 1999:132); the North American *Dene* (~people; see Asch and Smith 1999:46), *Innu* (~humans; see Mailhot 1999: 51), and *Inupiat* (~genuine people; see Chance 1966:4); the Australian *Tiwi* (~people; see Goodale 1999:353); and the South African *Ju/'hoansi* (~genuine people and real people; see Lee 1979:38). These examples are only a few of many, and one measure of their widespread use can be gauged by perusing the names listed in any encyclopedia of cultures.

The last-mentioned appellative strategy is superficially appealing, but it amounts to discounting the tiny-scale context of local usage and disregarding the common pronominal function of the vernacular, pragmatically if not syntactically (see Viveiros de Castro 1998:448). And, when outsiders use such local words as proper names, the result can be ridiculous. Imagine a government officer addressing as *sonta* (~us, relatives) those who refer to themselves by this term (those known to others as

Nayaka): in effect, the officer would be calling them “our own, our relatives” (cf. Gow on the Amazonian Campa, who designate themselves *ashaninka*, “our kinspeople,” and are now so called by others; see Viveiros de Castro 2012:98, n. 10).

The theoretical effect of substituting proper ethnonyms for vernacular terms has been to numb attention to their recurrence and ontological significance, and in some ways, the use of vernacular terms as if they were proper ethnonyms compounds this problem. It obscures the indigenous imaginations of plural life that those designations express. Despite their cross-cultural recurrence, indigenous we-designations have elicited little theoretical commentary. Claude Lévi-Strauss’s (1973[1952]:384) attention was caught by the common occurrence among Amerindian peoples of the designatory notions translated as “real people” and “real humans,” leading him to propose that these “auto-ethnonyms” reflect an indigenous ethnocentrism, a sense that humanity ends beyond a group’s boundary. Nearly half a century later, Viveiros de Castro offered a perspectival corrective and suggested, importantly, if briefly, that these “self-designations” are “personal pronouns registering the point of view of the subject talking” (1998:447; see also 2009:242, 2012: 97–98). For this reason, he suggested, “indigenous categories of identity have that enormous contextual variability of scope that characterizes pronouns, marking contrastively Ego’s immediate kin, his/her local group, all humans, or even all beings endowed with subjectivity: Their coagulation as ‘ethnonyms’ seems largely to be an artifact of interactions with ethnographers” (Viveiros de Castro 1998:447). Recently, Istvan Praet (2013) has drawn attention to such notions, approaching them as indexes of animistic systems.

Ethnographic studies of these indigenous categories of identity as topics in their own right, rather than as a means of studying something else, are rare, because the task presents a sort of catch-22. Consider again Descola’s rich ethnography of the Achuar as “good to think.” The name Achuar derives from the root *aints*, “people,”<sup>7</sup> and once it is used as an ethnonym, any topic of analysis related to the people so designated is prefaced by that name (e.g., Achuar native ecology, Achuar houses, Achuar gardens, and Achuar society). Descola (1994) argued that the Achuar natural world is part of society and that what Westerners perceive as nature exists only at the far rim of their world. “Achuar society” is the bedrock of his ethnographic analysis, and so to question this concept is to pull the ontological rug from under the inquiry. To ask how the Achuar subvert the modern sense of nature is complicated enough, but to ask how they subvert the modern sense of “being [many] Achuar” (i.e., how the Achuar figure the “otherwise” of Achuar) is even more challenging. While we cannot do anthropology without them, ethnonyms constitute what I describe elsewhere as Trojan horses (see Bird-David 2017). Once the ethnographer admits a proper ethnonym into her ethnography—and she has to—it

releases particular sensibilities of “being many” that defeat exploration of locals’ alternatives and subversions.

### Ethnographic Interlude

Imagine the kinds of scenes that I encountered during my everyday fieldwork in the late 1970s, when I first studied the foragers who called themselves *sonta* and who, in my writings, I named Nayaka. Imagine, first, that it is evening and fires burn in five closely spaced hearths between the handful of huts that make up the hamlet: several relatives sit talking beside each hearth, their voices carrying over to the other hearths. A generalized conversation is going on, one in which participants address no one in particular and anybody present can join in. Then, as night falls, grass mats are unrolled on the ground beside the hearths; two, three, four, and sometimes even five relatives share a single mat. Imagine, next, that the sun is rising on a new morning. Small family groupings leave the hamlet, unhurriedly cruising along narrow footpaths through the forest to forage or to visit relatives. A few couples leave for a day’s work on a nearby plantation. Later in the day, these relatives return and spend another evening together beside their hearths. Throughout the day, every day, the fewness of these people, all relatives, impresses itself on the observer—especially the depth of each person’s presence to the others, the constant exposure of each not just to one or a few others but to almost all of the others, all of the time, throughout a lifetime (a state I term “pluripresence”).<sup>8</sup>

Now imagine reaching outward to explore the horizons of concern and imagination of the two dozen or so relatives living in this hamlet (keep in mind here the time frame of the late 1970s, because major changes, especially in local imaginaries, have taken place since contact with government and nongovernmental organizations began in the 1990s; see Bird-David 2014; Lavi 2012; Lavi and Bird-David 2014). They are not isolated; they constantly visit close relatives who live in other hamlets, within a day’s walk in the forest, and these relatives visit them in turn. “Visit” may not adequately convey their experience to readers accustomed to passing through a doorway and conforming to the behavior expected of guests, even as the host entreats them to “make themselves at home.” In these tiny hamlets, lacking fences and doors, people commonly spend the day in the open (where they also sleep during the dry season). Guests join in their hosts’ rhythm of the everyday and take care of their own needs. The guests are not conspicuously outnumbered by the hosts, as might be the case in a large village. They stay for days, weeks, and months at a time. Their visits, in fact, do not involve taking time off from everyday routines as much as they do a change of those with whom one shares these routines. The visits amount to a reconstitution of the hamlet’s composition. The cumulative effect is that almost everybody in

7. See <http://www.native-languages.org/achuar.htm>, accessed November 11, 2015.

8. The concept is introduced in detail in Bird-David (2017). Compare Harry Walker’s (2013) concept of “accompanied life.”

the larger cluster of hamlets shares everyday life with all the others at one time or another. Similarly, Howell (1984:39) reports that the 130 or so Chewong intimately know each other, all having lived with one another at some time. James Woodburn (1968:49) recorded all those with whom one old Hadza widow, quite conservative in local terms, lived over roughly three years and found that they totaled more than a quarter of the entire Eastern Hadza population (estimated at 400 when Woodburn first studied them).

The 100 or so relatives in my study area constantly visit one another—indeed, they make it their project to do so, each closely sharing life with all the others. This larger group is not self-contained. The odd relative now and then comes from or goes beyond the ordinary orbit of visiting, usually motivated by the search for new spousal possibilities. If outbound adventurers do not return, they fade from attention. If they marry into places within reasonable reach of one of the five core hamlets, and especially if they pave the way for subsequent marriages with residents in those places, then the contours of the local cluster change to include the new hamlets. The horizons of imagination, meanwhile, remain those of personal reach.

Like all “encapsulated” hunter-gatherer populations (to use Woodburn’s [1997] term), these relatives maintain close contact with outsiders who have settled in their world, especially Tamil and Keralite migrants, who initially came as seasonal laborers to work on a nearby rubber plantation, established in colonial times, and who later settled permanently on local forest land (Bird-David 1992). Immigrants who interact with them on a daily basis are regarded by the foragers as *sonta* of a sort. The migrants, meanwhile, imagine themselves as members of their respective communities of origin—Tamil, Keralite, Muslim—or specific village of origin, and they imagine the foragers as members of the “Nayaka primitive tribe.” A trickle of other outsiders has passed through the forest, some staying for a while, including successive managers and workers on the plantation, timber workers, smugglers, and hunters. Foragers hear about the government largely from their neighbors, and they themselves refer to the government at times of personal agitation as someone they might visit or live with and who would properly care for them when relatives failed to do so. Forest creatures and features of the landscape (especially hills) are also beings within the horizons of unmediated personal engagement (Bird-David 1999). In certain contexts and ways, they are also regarded as “our *sonta*.” *Sonta* is, for these foragers, the predominant category of plural identity, and they extend it to all those they closely engage with, tolerant of their varied characteristics (origin, behavior, and even bodily form). *Sonta* extends outward from the core of relatives living together and encompasses others that they intensively engage with, its edges becoming fuzzy and fading with distance.

### Ethnonymic and Kinship Plural Grammars

Rita Astuti (1995) troubled the construal of ethnic identity on the basis of descent-based features when she showed that the

Vezo of Madagascar understand identity in terms of activity rather than being, that is, by what one does rather than who one is born to. The Nilgiri foragers invite us to go further and trouble the putative universal ethnic mode of “being many.”

The ethnographer who applies an ethnonym like Nayaka to a forager community of relatives refigures each of that community’s members as a “Nayaka person” and the group in a collective sense as “Nayaka people” or “Nayaka society.” The ontological options this naming expresses—the singular being, many beings of the same kind, and those “many” hypostatized and personalized as a singular hyperexistent entity—directly transfer into the local forest world the ordinary terminology of large-scale modern nations and states. Ethnographers have tried to minimize this effect, for example, by shifting from the use of the definite article in “the X people” to “X people,” the latter seen as less reifying, or to more personal idioms like “the people I studied” or “my friends.” Such rhetorical nuances reflect the unease of ethnographers with the dissonance between the available terminology and the intimacy of the fieldwork experience and, in some cases, even if not cognized, with the ontological options of “one and many” that the ethnonymic grammar embodies.

The ethnonymic option embodies, first, modernity’s imagination of “parts and whole” society. That is, society constitutes a whole, singularized and personalized, and its parts are individuals, each one a singular being. The multiplicity of singular beings is the touchstone of modern theories of society. This axiomatic basis is expressed in one of the most influential modern statements on human nature, seventeenth-century political philosopher Thomas Hobbes’s description of the life of humans in the state of nature as “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.” The last four adjectives have drawn general critical response, not least in the form of the “noble savage” thesis and, later, in hunter-gatherer scholarship. But the first descriptor is the most startling. Only strong ideological convictions could lead students of society to overlook their own daily domestic routines with family and relatives and axiomatically proceed from a basis of multiple solitary beings—this, and the crucial fact that, in modern, large-scale society, relatives have increasingly become a tiny proportion of the people inhabiting one’s lived and imagined order. There are always many “ones” and still many more “others” within modernity’s large-scale horizons who have to be anonymized, even some who are proximate. Amid the multitudes, a single being may be and often is held in the center of attention while others are relegated to the background. In tiny forager communities, even if one wanted to, one would not be able to focus on a singular being and push others into the background. All are close fellows and relatives, all are vividly present at once, and they are too few for any one of them to be ignored.

The ethnonymic option, second, supports the idea of society as a hyperexistent entity with a personal life of its own—an idea that also has roots in the seventeenth century. John Locke provided an early statement of this idea when he described society as “made up of many particular substances considered

together, as counted into one idea, and which so joined are looked on as one" (1900 [1690]:183). The idea, and the social arithmetic it involves, drew the attention of turn-of-the-twentieth-century philosopher and sociologist Georg Simmel, who proposed that the dyad is a basic and irreducible form but that, once a third person joins a duo, "societalization" begins. There emerges a completely new figure, a "we" that obtains hyperexistent life. More than two persons, and sometimes just two, can be regarded as a single entity (one can say of a family of three that it buys a house, goes on a holiday, and is or is not happy, and one can say of a nation of millions that it is rich and does or does not take care of its citizens). Tiny indigenous communities cannot be assumed to perceive themselves as forming such entities. *Sonta*, I show below, alludes precisely to plurirelated "many" (few-many rather than infinite-many) who are not and cannot be so singularized.

Third, the ethnonymic designation expresses a national sense of members' sameness. Members are all serialized, standardized, and equalized; each is a Nayaka (as elsewhere each is an English person, an American, and so on), and one can even speak about the Nayaka person (generalized singular). They are serialized as persons on a par with their serialization elsewhere as citizens, national subjects, and so on. The ethnonymic category functions as their common denominator, or using Anderson's words, it is the "weft" of a grid that "one could call serialization: the assumption that the world was made up of replicable plurals" (2006 [1983]:184). Needless to say, such serialization and standardization, which potentiate controlling large-scale populations, are redundant in a tiny forager community of relatives who personally and vividly engage with each other. Those born into such a community, to the contrary, constantly differentiate themselves through the use of diverse kinship terms for one another.

Peculiarly, even relatives are often serially figured in large-scale modern contexts. The relative is approached on a par with the person and the individual as a kind of standardized being of which many replications exist. David Schneider (1968:59) and Strathern (1992:82) each looked at how the relative is ontologically configured with respect to the person in the context of American and English kinship, respectively. Specifically, they looked at whether the relative is more or less "generic" than the person (e.g., whether naming a relative "Uncle Bill" individualizes that relative as a person). In popular discourse, another expression of the relative's standardization is its countability. One can say, "Sixty-nine relatives came to my wedding" or "My family tree includes 1,245 relatives." "Relatives" here functions as the plural form of the singular instance, that is, many times "relative," or many iterations of "one relative." Resonating with the national model, individuals count as "relatives" by dint of shared genes, even if they never meet or know one another.

Strathern (1995) observed that, during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, kinship terms offered the domain of knowledge concreteness but that, equally, the new knowledge of the time gave logical constructs a concreteness that kinship then borrowed. Perhaps using kinship terms in both national and

interpersonal domains has similarly involved a two-way traffic of meanings. The peculiar serialized sense of relatives is one expression, and it is not the only factor that can obstruct inquiry into indigenous designations such as *sonta*. Another factor is the ontological senses of manyness ingrained in national kinship metaphors, which have not been addressed as their gender basis has been (e.g., Bryant 2002; Delaney 1995; Yuval-Davis 1997). Embedded in idioms like fatherland, motherland, children of the nation, and the nation as family is the singularity of each member of a nation as well as of the hypostatized aggregate of members. Motherland and fatherland evoke a sense of mother and father as isolable beings, one or the other existing but not both at the same time (references to parentsland or mother-and-father-land would raise eyebrows). The father of the nation is a solitary creature, without a wife or mother. The children of the nation are serially plural, beings of the same kind who do not live with their parents. The nation as family, an image so gripping that soldiers die for it, stands in a whole-parts relation to the citizen children who constitute it.

Hunter-gatherer kinships generally, and *sonta* particularly, express ontological senses of manyness that have received little attention, although so-called small-scale societies have long been characterized as kinship societies. In the forager community—and, one could posit, in just about any domestic setting—kinship is about diverse relatives living together. They are diverse if only in terms of their situationality, seniority, and gender, and when only a few live together, idiosyncratic personality is also foregrounded. *Tama(n)*, or younger brother, which is a term used by the foragers I studied, does not connote one of a series, like the brothers encountered in monasteries, fraternities, and armies. *Tama(n)* simultaneously distinguishes its referent from older brother, younger sister, older sister, brother-in-law, and so on. In this tiny community, kinship is about relatives who, in living together, constantly differentiate each other. They do not distinguish themselves within a dyadic relation (e.g., parent vs. child or woman vs. man). They do so in the encompassing plural context of all those "(few-) many" who are pluripresent. Every relative is simultaneously differentiated from each and all of the others.

Those calling themselves *sonta*—and, again, I would argue, people in many domestic settings—do not perceive relations (in the abstract) as much as they do relatives (the plural vivid beings they live with). And they perceive them as plurally pre-given rather than as the sum of (countable) singular persons. *Sonta* itself is not the plural form of any singular word, and in the foragers' usage,<sup>9</sup> it is always prefaced by, and sometimes even functions as, the first person plural pronoun. *Appa(n)* (father) might be assumed to individualistically refer to a particular man, or scholars might view it relationally, as distinguishing one of the parties within and constituted by a specific father-child pair. However, for these foragers, this term calls to attention the inherent pluralness of relatives and their plural connections—for instance, of the father to his wife (his child's mother), to his

9. *Sonta* is a word that occurs in other South Indian languages.

wife's sister (his child's aunt and his sister-in-law), and so on. In the hunter-gatherer community of pluripresent relatives, one cannot easily single out one relation while pushing all others into the background. In such a tiny community, moreover, most people are multiply related, and they strategically choose which kinship terms to use, with cascading effects, one of which is to bring to attention not only pluralness but also the density and diversity of plural connections.

In today's terms, *sonta* is performative and "post-natal" (Sahlins 2013); that is, relatives constitute and reconstitute themselves as such by constantly visiting one another and living together (Bird-David 1994; cf. Bodenhorn 2000 on Inupiat; Myers 1986 on Pintupi). However, this continual "work" should not be misunderstood as reflecting a symbolic construct with no genetic basis. Since hunter-gatherer communities are generally tiny and highly inbred (not prescriptively, but because tininess restricts spousal choice), most members are connected by both birth and marriage ties. At the same time, the constant performance of these connections, through visiting and living with relatives, makes them categories of belonging. In this context, even a birth brother who has gone away and no longer keeps in touch with his relatives may be discounted. Barbara Bodenhorn (2000), who worked with Inupiat people, reports that she was often told that so-and-so "used to be my relative." *Sonta*, so performed, is scaled down to those within the horizons of personal reach—significantly, the personal reach of all (or most) of "us, [pluripresent] relatives." Performing *sonta* in this tiny and pluriconnected group, in turn, involves the constant "work" of recognizing the diversity of pluripresent relatives, if only in terms of perspectival kinship, possibly the most basic form of perspectival systems.<sup>10</sup>

*Sonta* embodies we-centered and scale-limited kinship that is about being together, diversity, and plurirelationality. In this sense, it extends outward from the core of relatives who constantly engage with each other to encompass still other beings who, however diverse, also engage. Producing and reproducing this community of being, I argue, is the project not only of the visits described above but also of gatherings that include spirit-possession performances, during which beings of all sorts who live (or have lived) in the vicinity—animistic, predecessors, ancestors, and others—periodically convene and share life with their human hosts (Bird-David 1999, 2004).

Tsing coauthored the name Meratus with a graduate student, himself a member of the community so named. She relates that he liked the label for an altogether different reason than she did, one that sums up the argument I have developed in this section much better than I could. For this man, writes Tsing, "*Meratus*, with its root *ratus* ('hundreds') evokes the diversity of the people" (1993:52). He liked that name as "a kind of *anti-ethnic* label, a label for a group of people who are all *very different*

10. The concept of pluripresence does not exclude bases of "we" other than those discussed within the limits of this article. For example, it does not exclude those that include continuous gradations of pluripresence and other relation-recognizing modes articulated with them.

from each other" (Tsing 1993:52, my emphasis). I suggest that foragers' kinships generally, and *sonta* particularly, reflect a plural grammar that subverts the ethnographically perpetuated national one through their emphasis on pluripresence and diversity rather than dispersal and sameness of members.

### Analytical Consequences

One might argue that the scalar issues tiny hunter-gatherer-cultivator communities present are no different from those presented by small groups within large societies (on the sociological "small-group perspective" on the latter, see, e.g., Fine and Harrington 2004; Stolte, Fine, and Cook 2001). However, the differences between these two cases are profound. To the extent that their autonomy (not to be read as isolation) allows, tiny-scale forager societies produce and reproduce their own traditions in a way that equivalent-size groups within large-scale society do not. These tiny groups do not constitute microarenas in which societal macrostructures are enacted and reproduced. They do not function as crucial mediators between individuals and society at large. They produce their own macrostructures, which are also microstructures—if a distinction between micro and macro can even be made at this scalar range of social life. Imagine a couple cast away on an island after having grown up in a context that presented masses of men and women to their attention and in which "men" and "women" were not abstractions but semiotic-structural categories engendering their public materiality; such a couple might continue to perceive and conduct themselves as instantiations of imagined gendered communities even after being marooned. But can we assume this option for foragers who live their entire lives with several dozen (shifting) relatives, including men, women, and children? Can we understand their lifeways, cultures, and ontologies in modern terms of imagining communities, that is, in the large-scale terminology of individuals, series, and hyperexistent entities? In this penultimate section, I briefly indicate the scope of this problem and its consequences by presenting three cases.

First, I turn to a demographer's work, informative in its own right as well as "good to think." Nancy Howell's study of the Kalahari Dobe !Kung (later renamed Ju/'hoansi, "real people") is based on an exceptionally large database for a hunter-gatherer community, the combined effort of a dedicated team of scholars working between 1963 and 1973, who cumulated close to 1,000 individual records (Howell 1979:17). Howell cautioned that a minimum of about 5,000 individual records would be required for sound analysis of demographic patterns. For the small !Kung population, it would mean, she calculated, records spanning more than 1,000 years. To produce the requisite number of records, Howell ran a computer simulation that "produced" (mathematical) "individuals" over a 1,000-year run, determining their sex and lifespan randomly and marrying them according to stochastic demographic availabilities at successive points in time. Without engaging here more broadly with this exercise—think, for instance, about the scope of changes potentially taking place over a 1,000-year span—it is instructive to

see what Howell learned regarding marriage rules. She had assumed (and for that reason devised the computer simulation) that “a noise generated by random fluctuations of events in small populations continually threatens to drown out the regularities to be observed” (Howell 1979:19). She found that “any rigid rules of matching spouses will regularly produce a situation in which a substantial proportion of one or the other sex will be unable to marry due to random fluctuations in the sex ratio at birth and the sex ratio at mortality” (1979:246). Her records of actual (not virtual) individuals include marriages of women to men 20 and even 35 years younger than themselves, so great is the diversity practiced and tolerated under this scalar predication. Her study, if anything, cautions that diversity may be the “regularity” observed by scholars and by situated agents living in such tiny populations of relatives.

As another example, I offer a brief glance at the more-than-century-long effort to anthropologically figure indigenous animistic cosmos. When Irving Hallowell (2012 [1955]) argued that, for Ojibwa, the “person” is an overarching category that contains various human and nonhuman types, he reversed the Western taxonomic hierarchy, in which humans are distinguished from others and only they can be persons. However, he upheld the concept of the “person,” focusing attention on the singular being. “Person,” I would note, is rarely a direct translation from the vernacular, and in many cases animistic beings are regarded as relatives of sorts (Bird-David 1993). Today, the scholarly tradition that Hallowell pioneered continues to project the animistic cosmos as a composite of different kinds of serialized persons: human-persons, bear-persons, thunder-persons, stone-persons, and so on.

My own argument (Bird-David 1999) for a relational animistic person—and even earlier thoughts on hunter-gatherer human-nonhuman kinship relations (Bird-David 1993)—was insufficiently sensitive to scale, although factoring immediacy into the analysis was a start in that direction. Even when “the person” is addressed as a *dividual*, the site of multiple relations, it remains a kind of individual, “a *dividual-individual*” (Sahlins 2013:26). To say that the animistic person and world are constituted by relations is to standardize and serialize “the relation” instead of (or in addition to) “the person” (on “the relation,” see Strathern 1995).

More recently, Descola (2013 [2005]) and Viveiros de Castro (2012) have added the notion of “species societies” to debates on the animistic and the perspectivist cosmos (the latter can be regarded as a subcase of the former form). In Descola’s vision, species societies are isomorphic with human societies. In Viveiros de Castro’s vision, additionally, the members of each species society view one another through the *habitus* of the “same” bodies, the “same” eyes, and so they share the “same” perspective on other species’ members. In both of these visions, the animistic world is constituted of multiple human and nonhuman societies, each in turn constituted of serial persons. These visions ignore scale and resonate uncomfortably with the ontological sense of a society made up of multiple persons. To figure societies in this way is not at all trivial for people living in

tiny groups, especially for those in tropical forest environments, epitomized by the rich Amazonian ecosystem, where, rather than sameness, diversity of beings is striking at any particular locale. Throughout these various phases of anthropological grappling with (in today’s terms) indigenous ontologies, the modern national grammar of serialized persons, relations, and societies has colonized the analysis of tiny hunter-gatherer-cultivator cosmos.

My last example broaches political implications through an issue that has specifically entangled the government of India yet has broad relevance for equivalent cases elsewhere. Recent years have seen a viral increase in India in the number of those claiming recognition as members of Scheduled Tribes (disadvantaged ethnic groups), in what has been described as a “race to the bottom.” The Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order, 1950, sets aside for members of Scheduled Tribes a certain percentage of places (called “reservations”) in government institutions and higher education institutes.<sup>11</sup> The extraordinary growth of members of the Scheduled Tribe known as Kattunayaka (as the forest Nayaka are now officially known, *katu* meaning forest) particularly worries the state of Tamil Nadu and the national government.<sup>12</sup> The 1981 Indian census estimated that 1,245 Kattunayaka were living in the Nilgiris; in 2001, nearly 45,000 Kattunayaka were counted, many of them urban dwellers who had never been to the Nilgiris. The numbers continue to expand alarmingly.

Claimants of native status in India apply for “community certificates.” Unlike the imposition of “blood quantum laws” in North America (e.g., see Spruhan 2006), these certificates are given on proof that the cultural practices of the applicant’s community are similar to those of a certified “primitive tribe.” Similarity of ethnonym is important in such proof (on the process, see Bird-David 2014). The suspected malpractice of some anthropologists who officiate as committee members deciding cases and as expert witnesses on behalf of applicants has concerned the government. I contend that anthropology has been an unintentional accomplice in this malpractice because of its blindness to scales of identity and to foragers’ modes of “being many.” Computer engineers use the term scalability to describe how well a solution to a problem works when the size of the problem or the number of clients it serves increases; adopting this term, one could say that a national mode is a solution of extremely high scalability to the problem of plural belonging. An ethnonymic designation holds out the possibility of unlimited membership, as the community is configured as a collective of so many singular beings who share an identity. Each singular being, from this perspective, is a Kattunnayaka, “the same as” all the others. The hypothetical eventuality that one last

11. See <http://lawmin.nic.in/lد/subord/rule9a.htm>.

12. See minutes of discussions on verification of tribal identity held during an official visit of the secretary of the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes in New Delhi to Chennai (January 7–9, 2014), [http://ncst.nic.in/writereaddata/linkimages/Tour\\_Report\\_07-09Jan2014\\_Secretary3077152684.pdf](http://ncst.nic.in/writereaddata/linkimages/Tour_Report_07-09Jan2014_Secretary3077152684.pdf), accessed February 24, 2014.

Kattunayaka person would remain in the world is ontologically conceivable in this mode and so is the eventuality (which, in fact, has become a reality under India's positive discrimination policy) that the number of Kattunayaka persons would exponentially grow to include far more "same" persons than one could possibly personally meet or even know of. The indigenous *sonta*/kinship solution, by contrast, is one of extremely low scalability, dependent on the constant presence of each group member in the life of the others and on continual sharing. These practices constitute and reconstitute who is (or is not) a member of the foragers' community of pluripresent relatives. Had the indigenous mode been afforded any consideration, it might have helped check the ethnonymically propelled viral increase of nationally certified Kattunayaka.

### Concluding Remarks

Ethnonymic designation is a necessary practice in anthropology's large-scale project, even though, paradoxically, it precludes analysis of what, in tune with the "ontological turn," I have proposed conceptualizing as modes of "being many" (concurring with Anderson's "styles" of imagining communities). I have argued that ethnonyms inscribe into tiny-scale worlds—the worlds of people who designate themselves "our own," "relatives," "real people," and so on—the "parts and wholes" terminology that comes from large-scale modern society, the terminology of individuals, series, and hyperexistent entities. More broadly, I have argued that the ethnonym is the chief member of a family of large-scale-biased forms and terms of analysis that, oblivious to scale, ethnographers uncritically use when studying all societies, including tiny hunter-gatherer-cultivator communities. One effect of their uncritical use is to obscure indigenous categories of plural identity and, thus, alternatives to modernity's idea of nation. I have elaborated on *sonta*, "us, relatives," a South Indian foragers' we-designation. This kinship concept is about diverse, pluripresent, and plurirelating beings, including nonhumans, and gives priority to living with each other over being like each other. The *sonta*/kinship mode subverts the imagined community of members who "will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (Anderson 1991 [1983]:6). It turns on its head the stereotype of the small-scale community in which people with the same identity and background share common norms and values. An inclusive as much as a sociocentric mode, it is a far cry from the putative unified group that reproduces itself by maintaining boundaries and members' commonalities in opposition to imagined Others. Plural life in the *sonta*/kinship mode is pre-given as diverse, and it is irreducible, whether to serial singular beings or to a hyper-existent whole.

"Us, relatives" is one manifestation of a broad family of we-designations that recur cross-culturally among hunter-gatherer-cultivator groups, but it may be one of the simplest and most basic. After all, lifting the scale-blind veil, we find that most groups who employ these terms are communities of relatives.

Further exploration of this kinship mode with attention to variations—for example, a scale-sensitive focus on we-designations translated as "humans" and "real people"—would likely provide additional insights into the mode of "being many" I discuss, and so would expanding the analysis to larger hunter-gatherer-cultivator groups and other medium-scale societies. Of particular importance for this task, I think, is continuing to develop analytical vocabulary for the ordinary everyday experience of being with different vivid and proximate others—rather than being singular, or being in relation, or in a group, or belonging to a group along with dispersed unknown others imagined to be "the same" as oneself. In this article, I have found it helpful to use pluripresence and such derivatives as pluripresent and plurirelating (developed further in Bird-David 2017). The idea of pluripresence, I suggest, brings into focus a range of plural life that is perhaps universal in human experience, a matter of everyday praxis oppressed by as much as it resists other plural modes, not least in nation-societies that generate their own intimate modalities (see Herzfeld 1997). Although such analytic terms could have broad purchase in niches within large-scale nation-states and in emergent transnational internet forms of "being many," tiny hunter-gatherer-cultivator groups can show us the possibilities and limits of such modes of "being many" in their most culturally elaborated forms.

Conceptualizing foragers' modes of plural life is challenging in an age when nations are taken to be so natural that, as Ernest Gellner observed, "having a nation" is like "having a nose and two ears" (2008:6). It is perhaps even more challenging a task than exploring alternatives to the Western concept of nature, the impetus of much recent research into hunter-gatherer-cultivator groups. However, we owe indigenous peoples and ourselves ethnography and comparison that take notice of the scale of their populations, the modes of plural life their scale/scaling potentiates and limits, and their horizons of imagination. We ought to recognize (in Latour's [2005:184] words) that "they are the ones defining [their] relative scale."

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### Comments

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#### Before Nation

At a recent conference on the archaeology and anthropology of sharing (September 2016, Cambridge, UK), Barry Hewlett

noted that, in the fieldsites where he works in Central Africa, parents holding their children turn them outward to face others. This is in stark contrast to the intimate face-to-face embrace so often favored by young mothers for whom being a “stay-at-home mom” is a moral decision that valorizes the mother/child dyad above all else. In Arctic Alaska, Iñupiat adults “pack” children in parkas; riding on an adult back, positioned over a caring shoulder, and encased in warmth, the youngsters see the world from the same perspective as their carriers while at the same time enjoying full body-in-motion contact. I am deliberately not using either gendered or parented terms, because the responsibility of sharing caring in northern Alaska may be so widely dispersed across age, kinship, and gender lines. Indeed, Raymond Neakok (one of my most important teachers) told me that, as a child, “[his] feet scarcely touched the ground,” because he was constantly being shifted from one person to another. Bird-David’s introduction of what she calls “pluripresence” is profoundly important; as reflected in the ethnographic examples above, it is simultaneously a recognition of inclusive gaze (a child does not look at her carers; she sees what they see), embodied experience (children are engaged with multiples of others from the start), and habituating practice. When the adults Bird-David refers to enter a social space and begin conversing without addressing anyone in particular, they are showing proper behavior—behavior that has been learned in a universe of knowable “us” groups. Even as we take into account the importance of small scale as an analytic, Bird-David urges us to recognize that the small-scale “we” is not homogenous. Crucially and convincingly, she argues against the Durkheimian notion that a low division of labor produces undifferentiated persons. Instead, she suggests, the “us” of her interlocutors is based on an appreciation of “people we are with,” not “people we are like.” Despite this appreciation of diversity among the hunter-gatherer-cultivators with whom Bird-David has worked, her argument that “small scale” by no means should be taken to imply “large scale” broken down into individualized fractal bits is, I think, equally substantiated.

Her observation that much ethnographic writing ignores scale is apt; peoples who number in the hundreds are ethnographically presented in the same manner as those who number in the millions. In addition, those labels often overwrite terms that people use to refer to themselves and create overarching categories that the actors themselves may not recognize. In Canada, for example, the right to form a “traditional” government has nothing to do with formalizing any of the significant number of ways First Nations people have historically ordered their political lives: customary Deh Cho Dene, Kwakiutl, and Inuit polities do not look the same. Nonetheless, in the early twenty-first century, “traditional government” must follow a template that homogenizes “indigeneity” and forces diverse collectives to adopt the same governmental categories already agreed upon by the Canadian Nation State if they are to exercise any control over their own lives.

Although I agree with Bird-David’s argument that more—and different sorts of—attentions to scale need to be reintroduced into anthropological analysis, I would suggest that an inclusion of the multiples of scales that characterize peoples who define themselves as hunters would make the model more robust: small, medium, large, very large, and really quite impressively large. This helps us avoid the “West/rest” dichotomy trap that, as a consequence, entices the analyst into the over homogenization of both categories, Western as well as “restern.” Bird-David recognizes this briefly, but I want to expand that a bit further here. Peoples who call themselves Dene, for instance, inhabit territory that extends from the interior of Alaska to Central America and from Alaska into Canada. As a rule, they do not talk of themselves as a single group, ecological conditions vary, political organization and politicized conflicts vary, but their “we” universe is not restricted to those they will know face to face. Nonetheless, Dene experiences of collective political organization cannot be reduced to some form of what Bird-David calls “modern” nationhood. To understand the dynamics of being Dene in 2016, we should, following Bird David, ask whether—and if so, how—a medium scale “us” operates as a factor in their social and political lives.

That invites, in turn, a closer consideration of Bird-David’s use of “nation”; we need to make a distinction between nation, as an extensive form of collective identity; state, as an extensive form of political organization; and nation-state, which combines these two and has a quite specific historical existence that emerged out of quite particular philosophical positions and political processes (see Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983, among many others). The label First Nations is indeed an umbrella term that combines diverse polities, all of which reflect historical processes. The label emerged from a set of political encounters in which peoples whose ancestors had been exercising sovereignty before the arrival of Europeans refused to cede recognition of that sovereignty to some form of thinking that assumed that nations were the “property,” so to speak, of the descendants of those Europeans. The Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission and the Inuit Circumpolar Conference are deliberately inclusive self-designated labels for boundary-crossing organizations designed to defend similar sorts of sovereignty claims. This history of Native American activism—currently and dramatically manifested in the opposition to pipeline development led by Lakota/Standing Rock Sioux and supported by hundreds of other groups from both Canada and the United States—is a refusal of attempts to transform their multiple understandings of “us” into a nation-state “us.” If we are not going to—once again—simply sweep our coeval companions into boxes of our own delineation, we need to leave spaces in our anthropological imagination for taking these multiscale institutions into account.

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The people whom anthropologists traditionally refer to as hunter-gatherers inhabit worlds of relatives. What remains un-

derappreciated is the tiny size of most hunter-gatherer-cultivator communities; if you live with them for a while, Nurit Bird-David underlines, you will inevitably be struck by the “fewness” of these people—usually all relatives. Throughout a lifetime, everybody is constantly exposed to not just one or a few relatives but almost all of them. Everyone is vividly present most of the time. Small communities of hunters and gatherers thus live in a state of pluripresence, as she calls it; they operate in a mode of “being many” that cannot be grasped by means of the conventional, prepacked dichotomies of modern thought. More specifically, worlds of relatives cannot be understood as individuals constituting a society. And yet this is precisely what most, if not all, contemporary anthropological studies do, even those that claim to have gone beyond the individual versus society dualism. Roughly speaking, that is Bird-David’s argument in a nutshell. Her thesis is a provocative one and is bound to stir considerable debate, especially among those with an interest in animism and indigenous cosmologies. And insofar as it critiques current anthropological techniques of comparison, it also makes a methodological point.

Let me begin with the issue of comparison. First, it should be noted that Bird-David offers us a truly anthropological piece in the classic French sense of the term: it is neither ethnological (i.e., it does not just focus on one specific cultural region) nor merely ethnographic (although it is based on first-hand research on the Nayaka of Southern India). Its comparative framework includes particular examples from Asia but also from Africa, the Americas, and Oceania. Some will find this broad scope problematic. Is not worldwide comparison terribly outdated, a relic from the days of anthropological ancestors such as Tylor or Frazer? And have such grandiose schemes ever led us anywhere, in the end? In an era where the tone of most academic discussions is set by regional experts and all kinds of “-ists” (e.g., Amazonianists and Melanesianists), I personally find Bird-David’s push toward a wider comparative project refreshing and insightful. Her article demonstrates that looking at indigenous “we designations” from a purely regional perspective would be an act of intellectual laziness. Their commonalities in different contexts across the globe are simply too blatant to ignore. One of the strengths of this article, then, is that it implicitly exposes the limitations of a purely regional anthropology that focuses on one particular cultural area or geographic zone.

However, Bird-David cautions us that not everything is comparable. In her view, it is unwarranted to compare, say, French society to the Nayaka world of relatives. The peculiarly Western idea of “nation” that informs the former cannot and should not be applied to the latter. The gulf between the two is unbridgeable, because they function at vastly different scales. Bird-David’s polemical claim is that the leading lights of contemporary anthropology (e.g., Ingold, Strathern, Descola, and Viveiros de Castro) have systematically failed to take this into account. The anthropology that they have engendered is therefore “scale blind.” In one way or another, these influential authors and those who have taken their cue from them have unwittingly let the misleading individual versus society di-

chotomy in through the back door. I have a few misgivings about this, but my aim here is not to establish in how far that critique is justified. Rather, I would like to focus on Bird-David’s conviction that so-called hunter-gatherers and modern, nation-like societies are fundamentally incomparable.

Why would this be the case? Is it a priori impossible to compare the cosmologies of small and more sizeable groups of people? Bird-David’s answer is that their respective horizons of concern are so radically different that any attempt to approach them on equal terms becomes meaningless; the very act of comparing the two necessarily distorts the lifeways and worldviews of the hunter-gatherers. Personally, I am less pessimistic in this respect. While I acknowledge that scale is an issue that many anthropologists (including myself) have injudiciously neglected, I still believe in the potential of a truly comparative cosmology to elucidate the weirdness of “our” modern sciences and Western modes of thought more generally. In fact, Bird-David has given us a beautiful example that illustrates this point neatly. I refer to the Nayaka’s category of plural identity, *sonta*, which includes the core of relatives living together but also extends to the odd Tamil or Muslim immigrant as well as to certain forest creatures and features of the landscape. It encompasses everyone and everything they closely engage with; worlds of relatives are always worlds of intensive personal engagement.

Now I would argue that a comparable category actually does exist in Western modes of thought, namely the biological concept of life. And the Nayaka’s *sonta* and what contemporary life scientists nowadays call “the biosphere” are on a par. Of course, I do not mean that they are identical; the disparity in scale is obvious. But they are nevertheless very comparable insofar as they both constitute an “ecumenical we.” In their respective contexts, they both delineate the widest possible “us” imaginable. An adequate if somewhat Western-centric translation of *sonta* would be “restricted life” (as opposed to the globe-spanning version of modern biology). Concepts such as the Nayaka’s *sonta* thus allow us to appreciate the strangeness of the biological notion of life that has become so dominant throughout the Western world. In sum, while I think this article makes an important point about scale and does an excellent job at shaking up a couple of received ideas, I am not sure whether scale difference, in itself, precludes comparison. In an era where the academic scene is, alas, pervaded by legions of pompous would-be philosophers pretending to “rethink” modern conceptions of life, people such as the Nayaka provide an alternative that is at the same time more radical, more creative, and more solid.

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Bird-David’s treatise regarding what she calls the “scale-blind regime” provides us with a ground-breaking argument that

sheds light on a bone of contention for most, if not all, anthropologists. In my opinion, the dogma had already appeared when Ruth Benedict saw culture as “personality writ large” (Mead 1959:vii–viii), and it experienced a resurgence with the flourishing of the “ontological turn” in anthropology.

The article advocates that the connotations and implications of “we designations” across very small hunter-gatherer communities have been significantly understudied. Indigenous “we designations” reveal modes of “being many,” such as the “us, relatives” of Nayaka. Meanwhile, the concept of the modern “nation” assumes unlimited numbers of similar members. In the former, belonging to a community is a matter of being with others (diverse as they may be), whereas, in the latter, it involves being like others (dispersed as they may be). Consequently, scale-blind regimes may distort our understanding of the lifeways, ontologies, and political struggles of indigenous communities.

As an anthropologist working with the San, southern African (post-)hunter-gatherer communities, I took the author’s words to heart. When I began my fieldwork among the !Xun (literally “person”), a group of San who are neighbors of the famous Ju|’hoan, I learned that it is both impolite and inappropriate to count the number of children, because each child has a unique background. Ju|’hoan is considered to be a typical society practicing universal kinship categorization (Barnard 1992), in which an individual must classify all others with whom she associates as members of some kin category. I am tempted to include Nayaka, which the author characterizes as a community of relatives, as a variant of societies based on universal kinship categorization.

Nevertheless, when I consider the complex ethnographic reality, several unanswered questions come to mind. I will discuss three of these here. First, it is plausible that, even in very small hunter-gatherer communities, not all social relationships are shaped by everyday face-to-face interactions. The extent of closeness/remoteness varies depending on relationships. For example, the G|ui, another well-studied group of San, use a wide range of categories to classify people. Silberbauer (1981:62) modeled these categories, in the order of the degree of blood ties, in concentric circles, with the ego at the center, followed by close-distant relatives, known trusted non-G|ui and known trusted non-San, unknown G|ui, and unknown non-San. Interestingly, when a G|ui forms a close relationship with someone with whom she has distant or no blood ties, she might employ the term of close relative. Similar application of close kin terms has also been reported among the Ju|’hoan (Lee 1986; Marshall 1976). Additionally, for both the Ju|’hoan (Marshall 1976:203) and the !Xun (Takada 2015:30), two people who happen to have the same name can form a close relationship. How does such multilayered and pragmatic classification of people relate to the indigenous “we designation”? At the same time, the imagination of nations can be repaired and reorganized by mundane international interactions in a globalized world. The dichotomous understanding of an imagined nation and a forager community of relatives runs the risk of

oversimplification, and thus cross-sectional associations (e.g., imagined relatives and mundane interactions among various nationals) also warrant examination.

Second, in a community of relatives, kinship relations go hand in hand with social norms. The members of the community must know what they should and should not do in a particular context (e.g., among the Ju|’hoan, it is desirable to marry one’s cross-cousin, and special respect should be shown to your parents-in-law; Marshall 1976). Thus, the author’s argument inspires not only scalar (size of communities) but also vector (direction of communicative choice) issues of “being many.” I find myself asking what significant differences are brought to the moral concerns of the members of the community by different modes of “being many.”

Third, the article encourages the reconsideration of micro-macro linkages. According to the author, the scalar issues presented by very small hunter-gatherer communities are profoundly different from those presented by similarly sized groups within large societies, because the former produce and reproduce their own traditions, whereas the latter do not constitute microarenas in which societal macrostructures are enacted and reproduced. Namely, the former enjoy their autonomy, which the latter do not possess. It appears that, in this context, “macro” indicates the societal structure that configures the clusters of actors, whereas “micro” points to the arena of praxis where such structure is enacted. However, the mechanism that enables the happy marriage between macrostructure and microarena needs to be clarified; in particular, how do population, mode of subsistence, and arena of praxis relate to one another in establishing autonomy? In my own research, I have attempted to show that, despite drastic changes in their politico-economic situation and the movement of members across ethnic boundaries, the !Xun have maintained their ethnic cohesion (Takada 2015). Clarification of the aforementioned mechanism would improve our understanding of the processes by which very small autonomous hunter-gatherer communities are transformed into post-hunter-gatherer communities situated within larger pluralistic societies.

The above questions are intended to complement the author’s work, and I raise them for further consideration rather than to challenge her perspective. As she suggests, more analytical terms are needed to elaborate what “being many” means in various contemporary communities. This article should enhance future discourse in the anthropology community.

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When we hear *ukiri ukiri* in Australia, we may translate it as “green,” but we should not assume that it is necessarily an

instance of “color.” When we hear *!ab* in Namibia, we may translate it as “river” but should not assume that this is the generic landscape term for rivers, because it may refer to only one particular river. And if we hear *Achuar* in Amazonia, we may translate it as a term of ethnic identity, which it may not always be. What marks off the question of ethnonyms is that it is politically much more salient than the other examples. The imposed assumption that everyone whom we encounter lives in a nation, an ethnic group, or another group with a corresponding membership structure has considerable consequences, as Bird-David rightly shows, not only for anthropology but also for the conditions under which small indigenous minorities live in the wider world. Her intervention is timely, because in an era of “Ethnicity Inc.” the evidence of people who live without a national identity and any comparable homogenizing identity is fading away rapidly. Virtually all indigenous people are now learning to use the register of saying “we,” meaning an ethnic group.

I agree that the effects of scale are often underestimated and that there is a double bind to it, because it is not just about whether there is “green color” in Pitjantjara (Young 2011:359) or “river” in ≠Akhoe Hai//om (Widlok 2008:369) but whether there is such an entity called “Pitjantjara” and “≠Akhoe Hai//om” in the first place, as a group or language designator. However, is it really true that we need these ethnonyms as key concepts for our work? After all, linguists do their work of describing and analyzing the ways in which people speak without (any longer) committing themselves to language boundaries. Arguably, many anthropologists use ethnic (or regional) denominators only as a short cut, a quick way of orientation, just as Bird-David continues to use phrases such as “societies” or “member” for the people she works with, although their ways of constituting multiple social relations are very different from corporate membership elsewhere. Most of what we have learned about social constellations in ethnographies about small indigenous groups is not invalidated by the fact that we also, at times, attribute ethnic terms to them. But as recent textbooks (Breidenstein et al. 2013:32) testify, ethnography is today no longer about “a group” or “a domain” but rather about recurring situations, scenes, or millieus that can be identified. I therefore think we can do ethnography, and certainly anthropology, without ethnonyms.

It is unfortunate that Bird-David excludes the huge middle ground, those people who do recognize being members of groups but not the (seemingly) “unlimited” membership of nations. What we are likely to find in this middle ground—among segmentary groups in Africa, for instance—is that people shift readily between different registers, between different groups of different sizes, between big clans with large anonymous membership, like an ethnic group or nation, and lineages of various sorts in which relations are individualistic and negotiable, right down to unique “pluripresent” relations in their immediate peer group. We may even find that they particularize their livestock and conceive of them in a plurirelating way.

To capture these shifts of registers, I have elsewhere (Widlok 2015) suggested to start from the social practices of talking in terms of “we” (or from acting nonlinguistically as “we”). “We” is a deictic reference (just like “here” or “now”), an “utterance or action that *necessarily* changes its meaning as it is used in different circumstances” (Widlok 2015:86). From that perspective, ethnic deixis is just a special case of various forms of social deixis, including kinship idioms. This is why terms such as “Ju/’hoan,” depending on circumstance, can mean both “we many who know one another and recognize one another as real humans (who by definition are always particular and singular)” and also “member of one group that is different from others.” In other words, the problem of scale that Bird-David highlights is not just a problem for small indigenous groups and their ethnographers but for all of us who use social deixis. In much of our dealings with other humans, we use personal pronouns derived from unique constellations with unique and particular people. However, as human beings, we have also learned to group and repeople into categories and to adapt deixics accordingly. Bird-David’s example of the visitors who become “*sonta* of a sort” indicates that these shifts also occurred in her fieldsite. Common is the distinction between an inclusive “we” and an exclusive “we” (excluding the speaker or addressee) or indicators of mutuality (“being brothers to one another”). Thus, “pluripresence” is a gradual phenomenon, not one that exists for small-scale groups only. Human selves are, in the first instance, always a product of pluripresence, but there are considerable social forces in larger societies that seek to establish “monopresence,” and they succeed when I see only “the American” or “the Russian” upon encountering someone. What is striking with regard to ethnic deixis (or nationality) is that, unlike other forms of social deixis, the state and its many manifestations (such as ID cards and forms for ticking boxes of ethnic or national identity) are codifying group references to such a degree that they become less deictic—immune to the circumstances of the utterance or action in which they occur. Once the state and powerful corporate groups emerge, ethnic deixis is no longer a level playing field, because distinct legal persons exert the power of limiting the choice of what can be said under certain circumstances. Legal bodies like “the King” or the “father of the nation” do not, by definition, have siblings, just as they do not age or die (see Kantorowicz 1957). The task for ethnography is to investigate empirically how much “a family,” “a house,” or “a nation” is allowed to regulate the limits of diversity and pluripresence.

## Reply

I am grateful to the commentators for joining me in thinking about the issues I raise and for bringing their own fieldwork experiences with indigenous communities in far-flung parts of the world to bear on the discussion. I appreciate their positive responses to some of my ideas, insightful suggestions for

expanding others, and critiques of points that I need to present more clearly lest other readers misconstrue my intent.

I wrote this article as an exercise in multiscalar (if not multiontological) analysis, so I think it useful to begin addressing the comments by clarifying its different levels. What I call our discipline's "scalar blindness" does not, to my mind, connote disability or impairment but, resonating with how the term "blind" is used in experimental scientific discourses, a method, a paradigm, and a conventional way of doing anthropology. The distortive effects of this conventional practice, however, concern me, and I outline four related moves we can make to reduce those effects: (1) foreground awareness of group size in cultural analysis, because size has phenomenological affordances and limits; (2) factor ethno-scale/ing into analysis by considering locals' horizons of concerns as much as we do their viewpoints; (3) explore diverse modes of "being many," which moves 1 and 2 bring into analytical view; and (4) develop a conceptual apparatus to counter our habitual use of large-scale-biased analytical language that reflects and suits only a narrow range within that diversity. In the article, I make a start toward implementing these moves, with specific focus on small-scale hunter-gatherer-cultivator peoples. I use their much-neglected designations for themselves as a prism on and means of ethnographic entry into their modes of "being many." And I develop the term pluripresence as a means of exploring their "we" modes and experiences.

Bodenhorn enriches this concept with her observation that it at once encompasses inclusive gaze, embodied experience, and habituating practice, and both she and Takada provide wonderful child-focused ethnographic instantiations of this habitus from their respective fieldwork. On his part, Widlok amplifies the timely attention to indigenous ontological alternatives that, as he aptly puts it, are rapidly fading away "in an era of 'Ethnicity Inc.,'" when . . . all indigenous people are now learning to use the register of saying 'we,' meaning an ethnic group." Bodenhor adds that ethnonyms homogenize the multiple ways Northern peoples have historically ordered their political lives.

In the article, I also downscale my own long-term study of forest foragers in South India in an effort to glimpse what scale-attuned ethnographic analysis can reveal of their mode of being many. I deliberately focus on their lives in the late 1970s, when I first encountered them, a decade before development and government organizations started working in their region, two decades before such organizations reached their particular corner of the forest, and three decades before missionaries contacted one of their hamlets. Their privileged "we-ness" at that time, captured by the notion of *sonta*, encompassed diverse pluripresent beings within personally knowable horizons—in other words, "beings-with" who were open to sharing and relating. This mode generally demonstrates how diverse modes of "being many" can be; indeed, a case such as theirs practically subverts the touchstone of overuniversalized collective identities—of groups, societies, and nations of same beings—the implication of their identification in India as Kattunayaka.

When I juxtapose *sonta*/kinship and Kattunayaka/nation, I by no means universalize these modes, argue that they exhaust all possibilities, or imply that they are reducible to opposed principles of "withness" and "sameness." For me, this comparison demonstrates end options that mark a vast unexplored territory, one that heretofore has been concealed by our uncritical use of ethnonyms for those we study.

A binary opposition is a red flag for anthropologists wary of the multitude of paired concepts long used to contrast the West and the rest in our scale-blind scholarly habitus—from the nineteenth-century kinship/contract through the twentieth-century gift/commodity to the twenty-first-century "one culture and many natures/one nature and many cultures." The contrast I draw between *sonta*/kinship and Kattunaya/nation need not be read as a new global binary, nor did I intend it to be so read. In fact, the idiom of scale precisely suggests a continuum between two end cases. Large-scale and tiny-scale (or small-scale) cases invite considering the gradations between them as well as the nesting relations between scales/scalings.

I therefore could not agree more with Widlok that we need to consider "the huge middle ground" between those two analytical poles and, furthermore, how people "shift readily between different registers," which at times involves negotiating between individual membership in large groups and in pluripresent intimate communities. Widlok refers to segmentary groups in Africa as cases in point. Bodenhorn makes the same point with respect to larger Northern populations "identifying themselves as hunters" who navigate complex multiscalar contexts from local groups to government-recognized First Nations to pan-regional native organizations like the Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission—a challenging case, indeed. In my article, I briefly follow this train of thought by alluding to nonindigenous domestic cores of pluripresence within nation-societies.

Taking us back to a pre—"Ethnicity Inc." era with 1960s ethnography of the Kalahari people, then known as Bushmen, Takada raises the importance of acknowledging the complexity of those foragers' tiny-scale kinship societies. Not all social relationships in such small communities, he rightly points out, are equally shaped by everyday face-to-face interactions, and the "vectors" of morally differentiated relationships have to be explored. I fully agree, and indeed, in my recent book (2017), I distinguish spatiotemporal submodes of pluripresence (e.g., between spouses, between siblings, and between parents and children). I also explore the "Nayaka" foragers' own horizons: my ethnography moves from a core of close relatives sharing a hamlet/camp (ego is a fictional being in this scalar context) outward: through relatives living in other hamlets, animistic beings, and neighbors who self-conceptualize as "non-Nayaka," all of whom the foragers regard as "our own" and as sorts of relatives. Alan Barnard's "universal kinship system" aptly conceptualizes their form of relatedness. But this is a tricky term if read (as it easily is in a scale-blind habitus) as hunter-gatherer kinshipization of the same universe other people register differently. Local scales of practice and imagination matter!

Judging by my experience, it is relatively easy to acknowledge the tiny-scale contexts of foragers' lifeways (the facts are glaring). But it takes time to cultivate scalar savviness and "see" the scalar factors (e.g., population size, horizons of practice, scales of imagination) bearing on those lifeways. The example Takada takes from George Silberbauer's work is "good to think" the disciplinary need for scalar vigilance, if not scalar reflexivity. In Silberbauer's (1981:62) scheme, the G|ui world comprises 10 concentric circles around "ego." The first six designate close-to-far kinship categories (e.g., one's spouse, own children, and own parents); the seventh combines "acquaintances," "affines in other bands," and "known, trusted" non-G|ui and non-Bushmen; and the last three include "unknown" G|ui, non-G|ui, and non-Bushmen, respectively. Now, Silberbauer (1981: 22) stayed for three months with an "isolated household" comprising four members, which later was joined by three other households (1981:24). He stayed with so few G|ui not because he was lazy. To the contrary, he traveled 3,000 km seeking out members of this community (Silberbauer 1981:22). With this in mind, one wonders whether "ego" is not a fictional reference point with respect to these people, too, and whether, for the G|ui, "unknown" marks a temporary position: those who enter their habitat from "outside" but, if they stay on long enough (like Silberbauer) become "known." Anyway, the scheme expresses pluripresence as a cardinal vector in that "known, trusted" non-G|ui (even non-Bushmen) are closer to ego than "unknown" G|ui.

I do not in any way argue that scalar disparity makes cross-cultural comparison impossible. I thank Praet for alerting me to the possibility that such a claim could be read from my discussion and for giving me a chance to better explain my position. My main intent in this piece is to caution that ignoring the "scalar elephant in the room" distorts the insights we can gain from cross-cultural comparisons and to urge that we integrate scalar factors into our comparisons. I fully agree with Praet that, although "the disparity in scale is obvious," it would still be instructive to compare, for example, what scientists call "the biosphere" and the foragers call *sonta*. In fact, I have done so in comparing Nayaka registers of flora and fauna in their home area with the registers of the biosphere program performed by scientists in the larger Nilgiris region (Bird-David and Naveh 2008; Naveh and Bird-David 2013; cf. Bird-David 2017:146–150).

Widlok is more optimistic than I am in suggesting that we can do without ethnonyms, even as he insightfully regards their use as a kind of deixis, "ethnic deixis." How are we to identify the people we study when our method dictates living with them (giving us license to use their "we-us" designation) then writing about their intimate world for faraway readers, our words aimed at those concerned with anthropology's large-scale comparative project (obliging us to discard "we-us" in favor of a proper name)? One of my major challenges in writing an ethnography of those I called Nayaka has been how to avoid using that ethnonym and create space for its critical analysis and how to

explore their own categories of identity. I do not think, as a pragmatic matter, that we can entirely avoid the use of ethnonyms, but we need to be aware of and scale-sensitively explore the modes of "being many" that they conceal.

—Nurit Bird-David

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